

Copyright
by
Zachery Brent Ingram
2017

**The Report Committee for Zachery Brent Ingram
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:**

Active Invisibility

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Jeff Williams

Michael Smith

Active Invisibility

by

Zachery Brent Ingram, BFA

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2017

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my childhood dog, and anyone else who has been able to see past my shortcomings.

Abstract

Active Invisibility

Zachery Brent Ingram, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Jeff Williams

Queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming: 'utopic in its negativity, it curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible'

-Annamarie Jagose

In my two years as a graduate student in Studio Art at the University of Texas at Austin, I have reflected on mediation as an imperative transcending nearly all of my creative and intellectual pursuits. I produce physical or ideological masks with priority over the objects and images behind them, using layers of paint, textiles, and mechanical processes in printing to retract information. These masks challenge the viewer's consumption, leaving something slightly improbable, resisting objectivity. The work presented in this thesis examines the motivations I have for returning to these formal strategies in the studio, for being such an unreliable narrator. Why can't objects outwardly express themselves? What is gained in return when crucial information is left out? Why do I produce questions, and often fail to provide answers?

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
VELVET ELVIS	2
IF YOU ARE THAT SOMETHING	8
AS BOYS GROW	11
A TORNADO IN PUBERTY	12
A FACEBOOK CONVERSATION WITH JON DATED 9/9/2015	13
THE USRY HOUSE FIRE	16
THE TORNADO AS A YOUNG GIRL	18
I SPOKE TO EDEN FOR THE LAST TIME TODAY. SHE HAS BEEN GRACIOUS DESPITE MY IRRITABILITY IN THE SUMMER HEAT.	20
DURING THE FLOOD	21

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Diagram of Elvis portraits (before and after)	3
Figure 2:	<i>9th Grade Biology</i> , 2017.....	10
Figure 3:	<i>An Unwelcome Gesture</i> , 2017	14
Figure 4:	<i>The Erection of the Magnificent Cross, Florence, MS</i>	15
Figure 5:	En Fuego Festival-goers reach toward the heavens while the tornado patiently waits	19
Figure 6:	<i>Untitled (Dan and Jeremy try new things at the foot of White's Creek just after dusk)</i> , 2017.....	23

INTRODUCTION

I'm not sure I want to fully understand the social and cultural milieu of the modern American South, yet I find preoccupation with monster truck rallies, Baptist church hell houses, and designer camouflage. Never having felt ownership over these conventions during my upbringing in the Mississippi Delta, I look for ways to present them with the same curiosity I had back then. I find a certain productivity (as well as a bit of humor) in the mixed messages and misapprehensions in trying to find congruence in an environment that was not necessarily built with me in mind. By embracing difference, I give myself the freedom to paint a new portrait of the South, including my own belief systems regarding inheritance, trauma, and desire. This series of works and short fictions allow me to look at what alterity enables.

VELVET ELVIS

We have to pry Mom from the front steps of the old house. It takes an hour to calm her down so we aren't able to move in until dark. I first notice the shades covering incandescent bulbs attached to the ceiling fan, how they make the room pale and cast ugly streaks across the carpet. Then how quickly the sound of a slammed screen door can travel from the kitchen.

I set down a cardboard box and run my hand across the faux-finish texture of a pastel wall faded from years of sun scoring through the mini blinds. I pick dust from the cracks and want to feel like a star on Days of Our Lives. I grow younger with each second. The previous owners have left us an impressive collection of Elvis portraits. They must have been big fans and regularly said *you know he's originally from Tupelo? Everybody knows him as a Memphis boy but they're wrong!* Portraits touch almost every wall in the house like a Dixie version of the Louvre although I don't know what that is yet. In the kitchen they hang in a peculiar fashion, sitting along the edge of a wallpaper border about the height of my chest. It might be hard for you to picture this, so I've drawn a quick diagram:

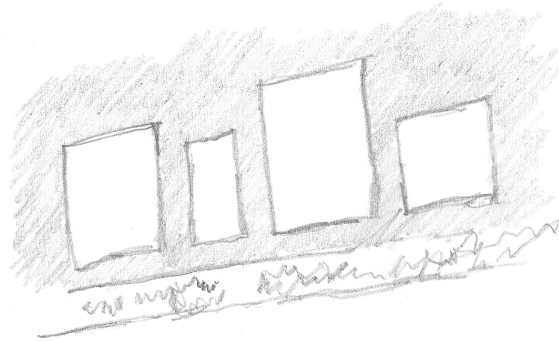


Figure 1: Diagram of Elvis portraits (before and after)

I start to deinstall for the next exhibition. I take down a square print that must have been from his aloha years. He has a very dark tan and flowers on his shirt. I think one of my drawings will go really well in its place or maybe a page from Madison's coloring books.

We should keep that one, Mom jokes –

No, the one next to it. Touch it. It's painted on velvet. Could be worth something.

It feels more like sandpaper than velvet, but I don't dare say this out loud. She is smiling for the first time today. I separate it on the floor from the others. Chatter starts to leak from the porch.

Our neighbors are more colorful than the ones we left the city to avoid. An older man introduces himself in a robotic voice as Kenny. His handshake lifts me from the concrete. A strange-looking man, almost cartoonish, he's the same height as my dad with a large gut that sags over the front edge of his NASCAR pajama bottoms. Over the back edge hangs his jet-black ponytail. Kenny is shirtless, and a large scar in the shape of a horseshoe stretches across his chest up to a plastic hole in his neck. This must be where the robot voice comes from.

His wife Nancy is much more approachable than her counterpart. She watches my pupils rupture as Kenny pulls a puff of his Marlboro through the plastic hole instead of his mouth. Her smile lowers when we make eye contact again.

You get used to it, sugar.

Do you like Elvis?

She chuckles and says she prefers Johnny Cash.

Looking at their house next door, a vague nausea strokes the lining of my stomach. I can't help but wonder how long it will take for ours to look the same, how long before the shutters start to loosen from their hinges and dad stops wearing a shirt, how long before we just mow around the rusty car parts half-buried in the yard. Pretty soon we won't mind that the tap water tastes mildly of barbeque or bother to pick up that one tater tot that fell on the floor. We'll have a pit bull chained to the cedar out back that leaves marks around the trunk as it tries to attack squirrels. I'll start to ride bikes with the neighborhood kids, get a silver tooth to match theirs, start smelling of musk and firecrackers. The portraits will return to the walls, or we will replace them with a new

collection of Toby Keiths or some NASCAR driver. Mom will start to drive a pickup truck.

On my sixteenth birthday, they'll buy me a pickup truck. Our house will transform into a pickup truck.

The screen door slams again. Back inside, Mom is replacing the kitchen Elvises with her collection of copper bundt pans. The absence of dust or fading where the portraits used to hang creates a perfect frame for each one.

It is years later and we didn't get the pit bull. Dad is wearing a shirt, but it has a portrait of Dale Earnhardt with the date of his death on the track. I still don't really care for Elvis, but I occasionally listen to that one song "Blue Moon." It's so short I usually play it two or three times in a row. When I hear it I never picture him standing alone without a dream in his heart. I see him winking, his face in coarse velvet, and I wonder how much that painting could have been worth.

IF YOU ARE SOMETHING, I AM ALSO THAT SOMETHING

Given the circumstances, I've been asked to provide my account of how I think we ended up here, but I hesitate to do so. I am sure you have your own idea of what happened and we do not always see eye-to-eye on matters like this. Instead, I thought we could spend some time catching up. I know I have not been in touch for quite a while but I wanted to see you.

The other day I was trying to describe the plot of a movie to a friend. I thought of you because I think your mom drove us to the theater to see it. God, we must have been thirteen or fourteen or twelve. The movie was about a pair of brothers around the same age as us. They ran away from home to join a cult. I remember because you said the older brother was really cute and I couldn't figure out why you said that. Do you know what it was called?

Is your mom okay? I heard from Mark that she was really upset when you told her.

As I look you in the eye I see the time we were practicing death drops on the carpet of my dad's RV when everyone else was asleep. I see the sound of my overweight thud and I see the pain in my neck the following morning. You had the idea to set off one of those colored smoke bombs for dramatic effect. I don't think I've coughed that much since I

tried my first cigarette. By the way, Dad had one hell of a time cleaning those stains when it came time to sell the RV.

What happened in that month I stayed at your house after Katrina? Man, you were so lucky to have power AND a pool in the hottest parts of August! I do remember our town was getting a lot of news coverage but we were not allowed to watch it so we stayed inside while people stabbed each other over bags of ice and gasoline. I imagine we probably played Guitar Hero singing only the lines with cuss words or smoked pot from a Mountain Dew can. It was great spending those extra weeks of summer vacation with you. Do you remember it that way? Do you remember explaining to me why Bush was not your president?

Okay, I can tell you are still uncomfortable talking and are probably wondering why I pronounce my long i's differently.

How about this instead, I don't say anything, you just watch the gestures I make with my fingers for the next few moments –



Figure 2: 9th Grade Biology, 2017

AS BOYS GROW

For better or worse, he's touched in the head they say to each other
watching him stare at the ground
trying to squash mosquitoes by hitting his own knees together.

A TORNADO IN PUBERTY

I keep having this dream about a tornado of a certain color; I want to say she is a pale green or maybe magenta, but then again, my eyes are always shut when she's close enough for me to really tell. The dream usually goes like this:

She slowly approaches my window, reaches under the glass and taps my shoulder in a clumsy but thoughtful way.

I roll over and crack open an eyelid, but by this time she is already two houses over collecting birdbaths and folding chairs from the neighbor's lawn. I walk to the window. I have a perfect view as she scoops them into her arms and holds them close to her chest but quickly drops them in the street. Sometimes she picks up her treasures several times over, perhaps to mend them from hitting the pavement. She is indecisive about which items to take with her. But she is also in a hurry, having no time to understand the position of her body or the direction of her face.

I tell myself that tomorrow I should leave a note giving her permission to take the big cedar out back. It is my favorite climbing tree and I think she would really like it.

But for now, I stand and watch her make trouble on the neighbor's lawn. It always happens on the neighbor's lawn. Whatever happened to the neighbors?

A FACEBOOK CONVERSATION WITH JON DATED 9/9/2015

YOU

Again, I wish you all the best.

JON

Man I pray one day u will know the love and forgiveness that Jesus offers, no matter where u go our sin and rebellion follows us. We will not find peace from those things that keep us up at night outside of Jesus. We all know the sin that is in our hearts we can ignore it for awhile but ultimately come back. Trust me brother I have been all over the world and the human heart is all the same.

Also know that I still value you as a friend and love to hear and discuss any issues or differences of opinions.

**Crosses
Across
America, Inc.**



International Headquarters
3300 Indiana Avenue, Suite C
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39180-4540
Phone (601) 619-0169
Fax (601) 634-0601
Email: crosses@cablelynx.com
www.crossesacrossamerica.org

Commemorative Brick Order Form

(*Tax-Deductible Donation of \$150.00)

(In Memory of, In Honor of, Individual Names, etc. are typical commemorations. Maximum Letters & Spaces per line: 15.)

Please use 1, 2 or all 3 lines.)

Line 1: _____

Line 2: _____ FÉLIX _____

Line 3: GONZÁLEZ-TORRES

Please print your order to assure correct spelling. Thank you for your order and please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions.

Name of Donor Zack Ingram

Address 3407 Werner Ave
Austin, TX 78722

Phone Number 601 937 0285

Enclosed Check, Cash or Visa Credit Card (Name on card & Expiration Date):

check enclosed

(Bricks will surround the Magnificent Cross in Florence, MS.)
*Please return form to Letterhead Address. God bless you!

Figure 3: An Unwelcome Gesture, 2017



Figure 4: The Erection of the Magnificent Cross, Florence, MS

THE USRY HOUSE FIRE

The wealthiest family in a small sub-suburban town owns a four-story house, the tallest in the town, actually. (it could technically be called a mansion, but locals aren't comfortable using such a word.)

Backing a 200 acre property, the house is highly visible from Mullican Rd, the most common route taken to get to the next town over.

It is afternoon in mid October

and word travels that its roof has been struck by lightning.

Townfolk from the surrounding subdivisions quickly gather on the opposite side of Mullican to watch it burn to the ground.

Restless children point at fire trucks squealing through the wrought iron gates down the narrow gravel road to put out the flames.

They have never had to put out such a big fire from such a big house. Their efforts are futile to the spectators' delight.

Several hours later the fire has planted itself firmly on the foundation and the ceremony is over.

Unanimous applause erupts toward the Weathersby family. They once again own the tallest house in the town.

A young woman in a tube top looks down at her six year old. She says, "This is what they get for leaving the landline plugged in during a thunderstorm."

THE TORNADO AS A YOUNG GIRL

You know what? I've been thinking this over for several days and we may have actually met several years ago. I was fully awake. She was much younger and had not developed her color.

I was at a Christian music festival in the woods of Alabama somewhere around 2003. I fondly remember the church van getting a flat tire on the way there and sitting next to a very popular girl from school.

It was early afternoon, and cloudy. The second artist began to play but got distracted by heavy winds circling through the open field. A small tornado began to form behind some trees in the distance. We might have been able to pray her away, but instead we ran from the stage.

Next time I see her, I will mention this in my note about the cedar tree. I should ask if that was her, and if so, ask her two more things:

1 - How she was able to follow me home from the festival. There must have been at least one hundred church vans leaving the property at the same time.

2 - What did she think of the first act, a Christian rap/rock trio.



Figure 4: En Fuego Festival-goers reach toward the heavens while the tornado patiently waits

I SPOKE TO EDEN FOR THE LAST TIME TODAY. SHE HAS BEEN GRACIOUS DESPITE MY
IRRITABILITY IN THE SUMMER HEAT.

you are a scrap of chiffon I

am a concrete bollard

DURING THE FLOOD

Growing up in the delta I only see stagnant water, the kind that moans but never takes a complete breath. This is why I'm struck by the sound the rain makes as it hits the roof this morning. It's stable, more compassionate. I open the backdoor. The sky is clear.

The way the river moves through the yard is like an act of history. The most romantic part is the sound it makes as the water touches my favorite spots in the grass. It starts at the back of our property, plowing over the thin trees and brush separating us from the yellow house of the family we have never met until today. Had they been holding the Mississippi all to themselves? Had it escaped from the dog house out back? Should we have brought them a store-bought pie the day they moved in?

Lucky for us, we live near the top of a hill. The opaque brown water, nearly 20 ft wide and knee deep for a ten year old, picks up mud and lawn chairs and god knows what as it pushes itself from one backyard to the next. It takes a sharp turn at the Cullens' fence at the bottom of the hill and fills the street before dumping itself into the dry creek underneath the city limits sign.

I learn a lot from the river, like how to ride a bike against a current and how tricky it is to swim uphill. I learn that sometimes the crawfish come to you, that there's no need to drive down to cajun country. I stand for a while with my hands lowered in the water "fishing" for lunch, and even manage to get a few and carry them home in the bottom of my t-shirt. Then I learn you need a cajun guy to properly season them, but those are much harder to catch so I let the crawfish go.

Tomorrow the river will be gone and my favorite spots in the grass will have turned to gray.

Tomorrow we will find out that the Meyer's pond several houses behind ours had a break in its dam. When the water has finished its way down the hill and filled the gutters, we will see where our river came from and stare at a handful of dead catfish skimming over the few inches of water left.



Figure 5: *Untitled (Dan and Jeremy try new things at the foot of White's Creek just after dusk , 2017*